

House redistricting plan cuts 6 districts from New Orleans

The Associated Press

BATON ROUGE — The first draft of a remapping plan for Louisiana's state House districts would cut six districts from the metropolitan New Orleans area and shift them to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and to Baton Rouge and its suburbs.

House Speaker Jim Tucker unveiled the proposed revamp of the 105 districts Friday to the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, to account for population shifts over the last decade.

The map will be a starting point for the redesign when a special redistricting session begins Sunday, and it's already attracting opposition from black lawmakers and Democrats.

"We tried very hard as we put this plan together to recognize areas of growth and areas of loss to make sure people in those areas had appropriate levels of representation," said Tucker, R-Territory.

In at least three instances, two incumbents would be forced to run against each other to keep their seats, Tucker said. Two other sets of districts would be merged and would throw incumbents together — except in those mergers, they include incumbents who have already announced they don't plan to run for re-election.

Tucker's plan would increase the number of majority black districts from 27 to 29.

The Legislature's black caucus and Democratic leaders are objecting to Tucker's redrawn map because they want one more minority seat in the



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State Reps. Mert Smiley, R-Port Vincent, and Helna Moreno, D-New Orleans, look over a map Friday as members of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee review the draft of a redistricting plan for the Louisiana House of Representatives.

Shreveport area than the House speaker has proposed.

"We are 32 percent of the state in population. Having 30 seats in the House is not unreasonable," said Rep. Patricia Smith, D-Baton Rouge, head of the black caucus.

Many of the adjustments are tied to post-Hurricane Katrina population moves reflected in the latest census data, along with continued residential buildup in the suburbs of Baton Rouge.

Tucker said only four districts would be untouched, while every other district in the state would have to be adjusted, either because it had too many or too few people or because it was affected by the neighboring districts.

Each district should have around 43,200 people in it to comply with the laws requiring equal representation.

In some areas, Tucker simply proposes to eliminate districts with term-limited lawmakers to make the needed adjustments. In others, he proposes significant revamps that will toss incumbents together or place them in districts that only slightly resemble their seats today.

Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes each would lose a seat, and New Orleans would lose three representatives. Livingston, East Baton Rouge, Tangipahoa, St. Tammany parishes, the Mississippi River region near New Orleans and Acadiana would gain seats.

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